International Congress on the Enlightenment Minster, 23-29 July 1996

Section: Literature and Philosophy Round Table: D'Alembert and the Encyclopedia

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J.A.G. Roberts, University of Haddersfield, England

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in 1767 Quesnay published Le despotisme de la Chine, He had proviously contributed GRAINS and FRRMIERS to the Encyclopédio, but these contained no spacific reference to China. This supports the view that Quesnay's physiocratic ideas were formed before he read Rousselot de Surgy, Mélanges Intéressans et curieux, 1764-6. In SCONOMIE Rousseau praised the Chinese practice of imposing Indirect taxes only on luxury goods. In SPARCNE Paiguet cited the Chinese emperor's support for frugality and a similar message in FOPULATION by Damilaville. In RIZ Jaucourt praised Chinese view that the earth should produce things of value.

In CHINOIS, PHILOSOPHIE DES, Diderot argued that the Chinese lacked the genius for invention and discovery. Therefore the west had overtaken them and had now outdistanced them by far. In SOME and VAISSEAUX CHINOIS Jancourt noted the deficiencies of Chinese ships. In OBSERVATOIRE the accuracy of Chinese extra-nomical instruments was criticised. Jancourt's article MEDECINE critical armomical instruments was criticised.

of Chinese medicine claiming Chinese had no knowledge of chemistry, were negent of anatomy and never practised bleeding. In INOCULATION Tronchin seved that Chinese method of inoculation against smallpox inferior to that ed in the west. But POULS by Menuret de Chambord had some positive comment the Chinese doctrine of the pulse, and in VESICATOIRE ou VESSICATOIRES acumenture described.

iderot marvelled that the Chinese written language had not been simplified and considered Chinese drama to be imperfect. In PEINTURE Jaucourt said Chinese painting imitative and lacking genius. In TOUR DE PORCELAINE Jaucourt sade disparaging remarks about the Porcelain Tower outside Nanking. Chinese applied arts better treated. Articles on artificial flowers (FLEURISTE ARTIFICIEL), on Chinese paper (PAPIER DE LA CHINE) and above all on porcelain-Jaucourt and d'Holbach interested in manufacturing porcelain of similar quality in Europe.

Conclusion

The entries show little consistency. In the early volumes Diderot's authorship of CHINOIS, PHILOSOPHIE DES gave some editorial direction and a comprehensive coverage of some topics. But many discrepancies in the commissation of Chinese terms and disrespectful treatment of things Chinese, so, the articles LI and MU. Many comments reinforced current stereotypes relating to China and the Chinese, some contradicted travellers' tales. Some of the admiration for the Editoriant and the othical code remained, but this overshadowed by the sceptical tone adopted by Diderot, d'Holbach and Jancourt. They used the Chinese mamples to criticise Europe, but their interest in technology and progress also led thes to disparage China as a country which had medieved notable things in the past, but which was now surpassed by Europe.